

Committee on Resources

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TESTIMONY OF KIM LILES

Mister Chairman, Representative Rehberg members of the committee. For the record my name is Kim Liles, I am the Special Projects Director for the Rocky Mountain Region of the Pulp and Paperworkers' Resource Council. I am also a shop steward for Hellgate Local 885 in Missoula, Mt and I have been employed at the Smurfit-Stone Container mill in Frenchtown as a paper maker for 24 years. I am very grateful for the opportunity you have given me to address this gathering of people dedicated to the future of our National Forests here in Montana and throughout this great nation. As a native Montanan employed in the forest products industry, I like many Americans am very concerned with the direction the management of our public lands has taken in the last decade or more. For too long we have allowed politics rather than common sense and scientific data determine the way we have managed or should I say mismanaged our National Forests.

I have always thought of our public lands and forests to be much like a garden, which require tending and care along with thoughtful planning and sound practices. Just as a garden requires nurturing so do our National Forests. They have become ticking time bombs just waiting for a spark to ignite a firestorm. We are also witnessing some of the most devastating bug infestations we have seen in recent history also adding to the fuel loading in our forests.

After having toured the Bitterroot burn area of 2000, I came away even more disgusted and with a greater concern over where we are headed. Having seen the destruction of so much old growth timber, habitat devastation and landslides contributing to the degradation of streambeds and water quality I wonder how anyone can claim this to be a prudent management policy. I do not understand why, when we have the ability, technology and where with all, we don't get about the work of reclamation, replanting and utilize the destroyed timber to our benefit.

Since when did it become un-American and wrong to make a profit on lumber? If we are to believe the environmental extreme community no one should make a dime on public lands on anything. Only they it would appear should be allowed to benefit through litigation and legal action while at the same time good hard working people are put out of work as a result of their actions. I as well as many of my co-workers hold them responsible and accountable for many of the jobs we have lost in the timber industry here in Montana and the Western United States. They always talk about compromise, but as I have experienced and seen through the years, the only ones who must compromise are those of us who rely on our natural resources for our living and survival. Many of these same folks who we are constantly fighting on these issues are not even from our area. They have no real liability in the matter. It is not their jobs that are at risk. Their only supposed liability that I can see is their claim of caring for the environment. To that I would ask the question of these so-called environmentalists, if they are really concerned about the health of our National Forests and our environment, is the destruction of over 7.5 million acres of forest lands, old growth timber and wildlife habitat and the loss of 24 lives as we saw happen in 2003 acceptable? Is this the way to manage our forests? Is standing by and doing nothing the right thing to do?

It is most disturbing to me to see over 345 people in the heart of timber country like Libby Montana, lose their jobs and sawmill because of the unavailability of timber brought about by appeals, legal maneuvering and philandering by others who believe they know what is best for us and the environment. These are not just jobs I am speaking of but a way of life. Our families, our schools and whole communities pay the price as well.

There is no doubt mistakes have been made in the past in managing our National Forests, but we must leave the past behind us and look ahead. I am one of those who believe we can have both a healthy environment and vibrant economy and still utilize our most renewable natural resource, timber. We must use common sense and be realistic in our expectations. When we come to a consensus we need to stick with our decisions and eliminate the last minute appeals and legal challenges after we have agreed. This happens all the time and further erodes our ability to meet the challenges that we face today. Honesty, integrity and common sense must be a part of the process just as much as science and the public review

process. Ultimately the health of all of our public lands lie in the balance. How we address this issue will most assuredly determine our ability to deal with other issues we will face in the future.

We have already seen the devastating results of allowing politics, emotional rhetoric and radical agendas to dominate the discussion. I can only hope we allow common sense and credible science be our guide now. The tremendous level of frustration I have experienced in talking to some of our Forest Service personnel here in Montana our Regional Director Brad Powell as well as Chief Bosworth and his folks in Washington is disheartening. It is time we allowed our professional land managers to do their jobs. It is also time we did what is right for our forests our economy and our communities. All I would like to see is a balance in this issue to take us into the future, forgetting the mistakes of the past and moving on in diligence. We have no more time to waste. Our forests are dying and burning up before our very eyes. We all share the blame for what we are now witnessing so lets get on with the business of properly managing what we have so it will be there for the future.